

# Veggie Box Newsletter

Week 4, October 7

Welcome to week 4 of the Fall Veggie Box! The origins of the CSA, like so many agricultural practices in the United States, can be traced back to a black farmer. Dr. Booker T. Whatley was born in Alabama in 1915 and growing up saw how small farms, particularly those owned by black folks, were disappearing due to expansion of mass agriculture. He grew up and earned a degree in agricultural studies at Alabama A&M University, then served in the Korean War where he built and operated a hydroponic farm to supply the troops with fresh produce. After his service he went on to earn a PhD in Horticulture from Rutgers University and later a law degree from Alabama A&M. Dr. Whatley is best known for his work to help farmers “grow smaller and smarter” and to focus on “internal resources” such as “the sun, air, rain, plants, animals, people, and all the other physical resources that are within the immediate environment of every farm” through a number of different methods. He first advocated for farmers to grow high-value crops like berries or heirloom strains instead of commodity crops that would compete with commercial agriculture. He created his regenerative farming systems, a holistic approach to farming in a way that doesn’t damage the land and incorporates practices such as crop rotation, topsoil regeneration, and groundwater conservation. In addition to regenerative farming he pioneered the practice of Pick-Your-Own (also called U-Pick), something that you have probably done with your family at some point! He also created a “clientele membership clubs”, the original version of the CSA, in order to allow farmers to “plan production, anticipate demand & have a guaranteed market.” He recognized that a program like CSAs could benefit both the farmer and the consumer by connecting the two directly. Though often left out of history books, we have BIPOC farmers, horticulturalists, and scientists to thank for so many sustainable and community-based agriculture practices in use today.

## Producer Spotlight

### *Hillcrest Farms*

Hillcrest Farms is a four season farm in Eaton Rapids that offers an extensive selection of fresh produce. Owner, Mark Kastner, started farming in 2008 gaining inspiration from his grandmother, a fantastic chef and farmer with whom he spent summers with as a child. Now he is known around town for his deliciously unique spinach and salad mix, as well as for the impeccable quality of the rest of his produce. His sustainable farming practices assure customers that products are safely produced with regards to environment and human health.

## Crop Profile

### *Beets*

Beets are said to have grown in the Hanging Gardens of Babylon. Humans originally ate beet greens but not the thin and fibrous roots, which were occasionally used in medicine. The large beet leaves and stalks were consumed like chard, a close relative. The Elizabethans enjoyed them in tarts and stews. Thomas Jefferson planted them at Monticello. Medieval cooks stuffed them into pies. The colorful, sweet root vegetable known as the beet tends to spark an impassioned response from folks who either love it or loathe it. Beets contain a substance called geosmin, which is responsible for that fresh soil scent in your garden following a spring rain. Humans are quite sensitive to geosmin, even in very low doses, which explains why our beet response ranges from one extreme to the other. Today, around 20 percent of the world’s sugar comes from sugar beets. Furthermore, Beets are a source of folic acid, vitamin C and potassium, which is important for the health of your bones, kidneys and muscles



## What's in the Box?

**Organic Arugula**, *Monroe Family Organics*, Alma  
**Yukon Gold Potatoes**, *Green Eagle Farm*, Onondaga  
**Organic Kale**, *Monroe Family Organics*, Alma  
**Jonagold Apples**, *Hillcrest Farms*, Eaton Rapids  
**Fennel**, *Ten Hens Farm*, Bath  
**Heart of Gold Squash**, *Tomac Pumpkin Patch*, Chesaning  
**Organic Beets**, *MSU Student Organic Farm*, Holt  
**Chicory**, *Hunter Park GardenHouse*, Lansing

## Add-Ons

**Bread**, *Stone Circle BakeHouse*, Holt  
**Meat**, *Heffron Farms Market*, Belding

# Recipes and Tips!

## Beet Pesto Pizza with Kale and Goat Cheese

1 large pizza dough (store bought or homemade)  
1 cup beet pesto  
2 cups kale leaves, thinly sliced  
\*1.5 cups mozzarella cheese, grated  
2 ounces goat cheese

### Beet Pesto

1 cup Veggie Box beets, chopped and roasted  
3 cloves garlic, roughly chopped  
½ cup walnuts, roasted  
½ cup parmesan cheese, grated  
½ cup olive oil  
2 tablespoons lemon juice  
Salt to taste

**Preheat the oven to 375 degrees F. Wash and scrub the beets and pat dry. Chop it into ½” cubes and place it on a sheet of foil. Wrap the chopped beet in foil, making a foil packet. Place the packet on a baking sheet. Roast in the oven for 30-45 minutes, or until beets are soft and juices are seeping out. Allow beets to cool completely. Add all ingredients except for the oil to a food processor or blender and pulse several times. Leaving the food processor (or blender) running, slowly add the olive oil until all ingredients are well combined. Preheat the oven to 415 degrees F. Dust cornmeal on a baking sheet and press or roll the dough to desired thickness. Bake the dough for 5 to 7 minutes with no toppings. Remove the crust from the oven and spread the beet pesto over it. Add the kale leaves, followed by the goat cheese and mozzarella. Note: the kale will cook down in the oven. Bake pizza for 20 to 25 minutes or to desired crisp. Top with a balsamic glaze if you'd like!**



## Fennel & Potato Gratin

3 tablespoons butter  
1/2 cup onion, sliced (from last week's box!)  
2 garlic cloves, minced (from last week's box!)  
2 tablespoons all-purpose flour  
1 1/4 cups half-and-half  
1 3/4 cups of sharp cheddar cheese, shredded  
1/2 teaspoon salt  
1/4 teaspoon freshly ground pepper  
1/8 teaspoon ground nutmeg  
Veggie Box potatoes thinly sliced  
Veggie Box fennel bulb, thinly sliced

**Preheat oven to 400°. Melt butter in a heavy saucepan over medium heat. Add onion ; sauté 2 to 3 minutes or until tender. Add garlic, and sauté 1 minute. Whisk in flour; cook, whisking constantly, 1 minute. Gradually whisk in half-and-half; cook, whisking constantly, 3 to 4 minutes or until thickened and bubbly. Remove from heat. Whisk in cheese until melted and smooth. Stir in salt and next 2 ingredients. Layer potato and fennel slices alternately in a lightly greased, broiler-safe ceramic 2-qt. casserole dish. Spread cheese sauce over layers. Cover with aluminum foil. Bake at 400° for 50 minutes or until potatoes are tender. Remove from oven. Increase oven temperature to broil with oven rack 5 inches from heat. Uncover dish, and broil 2 to 4 minutes or until golden brown. Garnish, if desired.**

## Sweet Fennel Butter

1/2 pound (2 sticks) unsalted butter, softened  
3 tablespoons chopped Veggie Box fennel fronds  
2 tablespoons freshly squeezed orange juice  
2 teaspoons freshly grated orange zest  
1 teaspoon honey

**Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste Mix together butter, fennel, orange juice, zest and honey until smooth, either in a food processor, in an electric mixer, or by hand. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Scrape butter into a decorative small bowl and serve.**

